William Blum - America's Deadliest Export:
Democracy - the Truth about US Foreign Policy and Everything Else
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what is the war in Afghanistan about?

With the US war in Iraq supposedly having reached a good conclusion (or halfway decent ... or better than nothing ... or let's get the hell out of here while some of us are still in one piece and there are some Iraqis we haven't yet killed), the best and the brightest in our government and media turn their thoughts to what to do about Afghanistan. It appears that no one seems to remember, if they ever knew, that Afghanistan was not really about 9/11 or fighting terrorism (except the many the US has created by its invasion and occupation), but was about pipelines. President Obama declared in August 2009:

But we must never forget this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9-11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans.

Never mind that out of the tens of thousands of people the United States and its NATO front have killed in Afghanistan not one has been identified as having had anything to do with the events of September 11, 2001

Never mind that the 'plotting to attack America' in 2001 was carried out in Germany and Spain and the United States more than in Afghanistan. Why hasn't the United States attacked those countries?

Indeed, what actually was needed to plot to buy airline tickets and take flying lessons in the United States? A room with some chairs? What does 'an even larger safe haven' mean? A larger room with more chairs? Perhaps a blackboard? Terrorists intent upon attacking the United States can meet almost anywhere.

The only 'necessity' that drove the United States to Afghanistan was the desire to establish a military presence in this land that is next door to the Caspian Sea region of Central Asia - which reportedly contains the second largest proven reserves of petroleum and natural gas in the world - and build oil and gas pipelines from that region running through Afghanistan. Afghanistan is well situated for oil and gas pipelines to serve much of South Asia, pipelines that can bypass those not-yet Washington clients Iran and Russia. If only the Taliban would not attack the Ines. Here's Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, in 2007:

'One of our goals is to stabilize Afghanistan, so it can become a conduit and a hub between South and Central Asia so that energy can flow to the south.'

Since the 1980s all kinds of pipelines have been planned for the area, only to be delayed or canceled by one military, financial, or political problem or another. For example, the so-called TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) had strong support from Washington, which was eager to block a competing pipeline that would bring gas to Pakistan and India from Iran. TAPI goes back to the late 1990s, when the Taliban government held talks with the California-based oil company Unocal Corporation. These talks were conducted with the full knowledge of the Clinton administration, and were undeterred by the extreme repression of Taliban society. Taliban officials even made trips to the United States for discussions.

Testifying before the House Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific on February 12, 1998, Unocal representative John Maresca discussed the importance of the pipeline project and the increasing difficulties in dealing with the Taliban:

The region's total oil reserves may well reach more than 60 billion barrels of oil. Some estimates are as high as 200 billion barrels ... From the outset, we have made it clear that construction of the pipeline we have proposed across Afghanistan could not begin until a recognized government is in place that has the confidence of governments, leaders, and our company.

When those talks stalled in July, 2001 the Bush administration threatened the Taliban with military reprisals if the government did not go along with American demands. The talks finally broke down for good the following month, a month before 9/11.

The United States has been serious indeed about the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf oil and gas areas. Through one war or another beginning with the Gulf War of 1990-91, the US has managed to establish military bases in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

The war against the Taliban can't be 'won' short of killing everyone in Afghanistan. The United States may well try again to negotiate some form of pipeline security with the Taliban, then get out, and declare 'victory.' Barack Obama can surely deliver an eloquent victory speech from his teleprompter. It might include the words 'freedom' and 'democracy,' but certainly not 'pipeline.'

What it's about for Germany

The German president, Horst Koehler, resigned in June 2010 because he said something government officials are not to say. He said that Germany was fighting in Afghanistan for economic reasons. No reference to democracy. Nothing about freedom. Not a word about Good Guys fighting Bad Guys. The word 'terrorism' was not mentioned at all. Neither was 'God.' On a trip to German troops in Afghanistan he had declared that a country such as Germany, dependent on exports and free trade, must be prepared to use military force. The country, he said, had to act 'to protect our interests, for example free trade routes, or to prevent regional instability which might certainly have a negative effect on our trade, jobs and earnings.'

Koehler has said something openly that has been obvious from the beginning,' said the head of Germany's Left Party. 'German soldiers are risking life and limb in Afghanistan to defend the export interests of big economic interests.' Other opposition politicians had called for Koehler to take back the remarks and accused him of damaging public acceptance of German military missions abroad.

As T.S. Eliot famously observed: 'Humankind cannot bear very much reality.'

The myths of Afghanistan, past and present

On the Fourth of July, 2009 Senator Patrick Leahy declared he was optimistic that, unlike the Soviet forces that were driven from Afghanistan twenty years ago, US forces could succeed there. The Democrat from Vermont stated:

The Russians were sent running as they should have been. We helped send them running. But they were there to conquer the country. We've made it very clear, and everybody I talk to within Afghanistan feels the same way: they know we're there to help and we're going to leave. We've made it very clear we are going to leave. And it's going to be turned back to them. The ones that made the mistakes in the past are those that tried to conquer them.

Leahy is a long-time liberal on foreign policy issues, a champion of withholding US counter-narcotics assistance from foreign military units guilty of serious human- rights violations, and an outspoken critic of robbing terrorist suspects of their human and legal rights. Yet he was willing to send countless young Americans to a horrible death, or maimed survival. And for what? Every point he made in his statement was simply wrong.

The Russians were not in Afghanistan to conquer it. The Soviet Union had lived next door to the country for more than sixty years without any kind of invasion. It was only when the United States intervened in Afghanistan to replace a government friendly to Moscow with one militantly anti-communist that the Russians invaded to do battle with the US-supported Islamic jihadists; precisely what the United States would have done to prevent a communist government in Canada or Mexico.

As to the US leaving ... utterly meaningless propaganda until it happens. Ask the people of South Korea - fifty-six years of American occupation and still counting; ask the people of Japan - sixty-four years. It's not even correct to say that the Russians were sent running. That was essentially Russian president Mikhail Gorbachev's decision, and it was more of a political decision than a military one. Gorbachev's fondest ambition was to turn the Soviet Union into a West European-style social

democracy, and he fervently wished for the approval of those European leaders, virtually all of whom were Cold War anti-communists and opposed the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan.

It's also rather difficult for the United States to claim that it's in Afghanistan to help the people there when one considers all the harm and suffering it has already inflicted upon those utterly downtrodden people for more than thirty years.